

FATHERHOOD IS FOREVER

A Guide for Fathers

Fathers and mothers bring different qualities to a child's life and each are equally important! All children need two parents, whether they live together or not, and all children need emotional and financial support from both parents.

The fatherhood partnership between the Detroit Lions and the Office of Child Support—the first of its kind in the nation—began in 1995. The fatherhood campaign is an outgrowth of the hospital paternity program's public information efforts. Fathers are encouraged to realize the important role they play and the responsibilities they have in raising a child.

The campaign goal is to convey to young people the importance of family life and to encourage fathers—whether married, divorced or single—to become involved in their children's lives. The campaign seeks to increase awareness of fatherhood and paternity issues using professional sports figures as role models.

Many experts in the field of child development have expressed concern regarding the role of fathers in their children's lives. A 1997 article by Ronald L. Klinger, Ph.D., (family therapist) "Addressing the Fatherlessness Trend" reported that America is the world leader in numbers of families without fathers. He also indicated that from 1960 to 1990 the number of children living only with their mother jumped from 5.1 million to 15.6 million. Dr. Klinger includes evidence from educators, law enforcement officials, mental health facilities and teen pregnancy programs that show the negative consequences of raising children without fathers. He states that "children involved with their fathers have stronger self-esteem, are less susceptible to peer pressure, show greater skills and competence, and are more self reliant."

What is Responsible FATHERHOOD?

Every child needs a committed father. A father is one of the most important people in a child's life. Being a father involves special responsibilities and rewards. Fathers must be encouraged in their efforts to raise children. Responsible fathers are men who:

- ◆ Wait until they are emotionally and financially prepared to father children.
- ◆ Establish legal paternity when they father a child out of wedlock.
- ◆ Actively share with the mother in providing physical, emotional, and intellectual needs for their child.

- ◆ Help their child learn and grow. Parents are a child's first—and most important—teacher. Encourage their child to learn and be creative:
 - Talk together.
 - Explain how things work.
 - Allow for playtime.
 - Teach responsible behavior.
 - Instill character values.
 - Teach by positive example—be a positive role model.
- ◆ Look after their child's physical health. Do their best to see that their child gets:
 - Healthy foods.
 - Good medical care.
 - Exercise.
 - Enough sleep.
- ◆ Understand their child's emotional needs.
 - Make their child feel loved for who they are.
 - Protect their child. The child must be able to count on their father's love.
 - Provide plenty of hugs and kisses.
 - Praise their child for accomplishments.
 - Provide open and honest communication with their child.
- ◆ Conduct themselves with basic dignity and self-respect.
- ◆ Spend quality time with their child.
- ◆ Know their child's friends.
- ◆ Maintain responsible relationships and separate problems in other relationships from the relationship with their child.
- ◆ Take responsibility for knowing basic life and child development skills such as changing diapers, fostering early child development, and providing for their child's basic health needs.
- ◆ Recognize that fatherhood is a life-long commitment.
- ◆ Ensure their child is financially supported.

RIGHTS of Fatherhood

Every child has a right to a responsible, loving, and committed father. Men who are responsible fathers should be granted rights that acknowledge and support their commitment to being better dads. These fathers have a right to:

- ◆ Know and establish themselves legally as a father.
- ◆ Have a relationship with their children.
- ◆ Not be discriminated against.
- ◆ Be geographically close to their children.
- ◆ Have equal access to their child.

Co-parenting TIPS for Parents

It is a child's right to have a relationship with both biological parents. Children need to feel loved and supported by both parents. Parents will have to work together for the rest of their lives—not just until their child turns 18. Having co-parenting skills will benefit everyone.

- ◆ Keep a flexible routine. Help your child feel that he/she has two homes, mom's and dad's. Live as close to each other as possible.
- ◆ Talk to each other and keep focused on the subject of your child. Your child should not serve as the direct line of communication between the two of you.
- ◆ Take the anger out of your communications. Do not use your child as a way to get back at each other or validate your anger with each other.
- ◆ Get help dealing with the inevitable anger from a broken relationship. Learn to communicate in a less reactive, more proactive, way.
- ◆ Help prepare your child for visits. Be positive about the experience.
- ◆ Share information. Have a calendar with all the family engagements written on it and let the other parent know of any changed plans.
- ◆ Set up a system for monthly phone calls or meetings with a specific list of required issues to discuss.
- ◆ Work together—
 - Decide on what values you want to teach and how to teach them.
 - Share discipline duties.
 - Divide the work.
 - Support each other.
- ◆ Never talk badly about the other parent in front of your children.

ACTIVITIES to do with your CHILD

- ◆ Show your child lots of love and affection.
- ◆ Plan meals when you and your child have a chance to share experiences, thoughts, or feelings you have that day.
- ◆ Go for walks together.
- ◆ Listen to your child when he/she needs to talk.
- ◆ Visit your child's school or classroom. Meet his/her teacher.
- ◆ Play with your child. Watch as your child plays; observe his/her creativity.
- ◆ If your child is not living with you, commit yourself to a phone call or lunch date.
- ◆ Visit a playground, zoo, or museum together.
- ◆ Ask your child what is the one thing you do that he/she would like to learn, and then teach it.
- ◆ Put an encouraging note in the textbook of your child's worst subject.
- ◆ Take your child to the library and give him/her time to browse and check out some books.
- ◆ Discuss with your child some goals for the school year—his/hers and yours.
- ◆ Encourage your child to join various clubs and organizations.
- ◆ Listen to your child's favorite music. Ask him/her what he likes about the music.
- ◆ Read to your child.
- ◆ Watch a television show together and share thoughts.
- ◆ Discuss an area in which you and your child disagree—and listen!
- ◆ Play games, or play ball.
- ◆ Do artwork, write stories and poems—or build something together.
- ◆ Cook a meal together.

Steps for Better LISTENING

Father to Son

- ◆ Allow him the full range of emotions. Help him learn that real men can be afraid, can hurt, and can cry. It is important for fathers to model appropriate anger that does not threaten, control or hurt anyone else.
- ◆ Encourage him to respect girls and women as equals, rather than objects to be controlled, dominated, or manipulated.
- ◆ Encourage him to learn negotiating skills. Teach him that compromise is a necessary part of human relationships and not a sign of weakness.
- ◆ Help him take responsibility for his own behavior. Don't encourage a "boys will be boys" attitude that excuses selfishness, impulsiveness, and domination. If he hurts someone, encourage him to apologize.
- ◆ Teach him that it is all right for a man to ask for help, support, and healthy affection.
- ◆ Teach him that masculinity is about having moral principles and being a man of character.
- ◆ Limit the violence that he watches on television, in video games, and movies.
- ◆ Discuss healthy sexuality with him, and the importance of being responsible.

Father to Daughter

- ◆ Listen to her. A father who listens will reap the benefits of his daughter's trust.
- ◆ Model positive masculinity; make your family a high priority, keep your promises and invest in the lives around you.
- ◆ Model healthy behavior toward women.
- ◆ Take her shopping and do your best to identify her unique tastes.
- ◆ Show your daughter approval and affection.
- ◆ Discuss what age she will be allowed to wear makeup or allowed to date.
- ◆ When your teenage daughter breaks up with her boyfriend, let her know that there is a man who will always accept and love her.
- ◆ Ask her what she enjoys doing with you, and then set up time to do that with her.

Ideas on DISCIPLINE

The goal on discipline is to help your child build his/her own self-control. Discipline techniques are often age specific and may need to change as your child grows and develops. When your child makes a mistake, focus on the behavior not the child. Remember that it only becomes a mistake when you don't learn from it.

Tips for Encouraging Appropriate Behavior:

- ◆ Set rules. Help your child clearly understand your expectations of his/her behavior.
- ◆ Discuss consequences of misbehavior before it occurs. Have the child help set the consequences.
- ◆ Give praise often, so your child knows how well he/she is doing.
- ◆ Realize problems can be expected when your child is bored, tired, or frustrated.
- ◆ Give your child safe choices.
- ◆ Don't wait to deal with your child until you have been pushed past your limit.
- ◆ Teach your child appropriate behavior by modeling appropriate behavior.

Tips for when Misbehavior Occurs:

- ◆ Step in immediately when your child is harming themselves or others.
- ◆ Realize that calling attention to the misbehavior might be enough, if the behavior stops.
- ◆ Let your child know why he is being disciplined, if behavior continues.
- ◆ Be consistent in disciplining your child to avoid confusion. Make sure both you and your child's mother agree on discipline styles and expectations.
- ◆ Use calm, positive words instead of threatening words.
- ◆ Make sure consequences are realistic, enforceable, and fit the behavior.
- ◆ Try time outs. When your child misbehaves, make him/her spend several minutes alone.
- ◆ Be consistent with enforcing consequences.

SOURCES of help and information

If you are having problems or feeling overwhelmed, you can turn to:

- ◆ Family members—Call on relatives to lend a helping hand now and then.
- ◆ Other parents—They can give you helpful advice and lend an understanding ear. You have plenty to gain from their experience.
- ◆ Family physician.
- ◆ Local library.
- ◆ Church.
- ◆ Parenting workshops and classes -- To see if there are any in your area, contact a local:
 - Human service agency.
 - Social service organizations.
 - Community health center.
 - Father organizations.

If you have questions on paternity or child support, contact the child support specialist at your county Family Independence Agency.

Recommended BOOKS on Fatherhood

Becoming a Father: A Handbook for expectant fathers. S. Gresh. (1980).

Father love: What we need, what we seek, what we must create. Richard Louv. (1993).

Getting men involved: Strategies for early childhood Programs. J.A. Levine, D.T. Murphy & S. Wilson. (1993).

Like Father, Like Son. Hunter Fulghum. (1997).

Reaching and serving the teenage father. D. Klinman & J. Sanders. (1985).

The Measure of a Man: Becoming the father you wish your father had been. J. Shapiro. (1993).

The Prodigal Father: Reuniting fathers with their children. Mark Bryan. (1997).

The Role of the Father in Child Development. M. Lamb. (1997).

Books for Children on Fathers

My Daddy and I.... Eloise Greenfield. A little boy spends the day with his dad. Geared for toddlers.

Listening Walk. Paul Showers. A little girl takes a walk with her father. Ages 3 to 7.

Amazon Boy. Ted Lewin. Paulo's father arranges a trip don the Amazon as a birthday present to his son. Ages 5 to 8.

When Willard Met Babe Ruth. Donald Hall. A warm story of a father and son's love of baseball. Ages 10 and up.

*For a detailed list of books for kids and dads,
visit the Parents Place website at
www.parentsplace.com.

BE THE BEST FATHER YOU CAN BE!

- ◆ Understand your child's needs—physical, emotional, and intellectual.
- ◆ Get advice or help from others when you need it.
- ◆ Stay involved in you child's life.

**Being a father is a big responsibility—
that brings big rewards.**